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Justified Faith without Reasons?

A Comparison between Søren Kierkegaard's and Alvin Plantinga's Epistemologies

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Foreword

The present study was accepted as an inaugural dissertation in July 2022 by the Department of Protestant Theology at Goethe-University Frankfurt. The text of the manuscript was checked for printing and supplemented in a few places before publication.

I should like to thank all those who gave me advice and support during the time of my doctoral studies. Special thanks are due to my doctoral supervisors, Prof. Dr. Heiko Schulz (Goethe-University Frankfurt) and Prof. Dr. Oliver Wiertz (*Hochschule für Theologische Studien* Frankfurt) for their plentiful encouragement and support. Their sound guidance and many helpful impulses and suggestions helped me immensely in working on the topic! I am also deeply grateful to Prof. Dr. Alvin Plantinga, who, with his vast knowledge, perspicacity, repeatedly offered me good advice, feedback and encouragement and helped me to clear up and eliminate certain ambiguities regarding some aspects of his thought. In 2017, while I was working on the dissertation, he was awarded the prestigious Templeton Prize for his "rigorous scholarship," which for "over a half century has made theism a serious option within the academy" – an honor well deserved! I would also thank Prof. Dr. C. Stephen Evans (Baylor University, Waco, TX) for many conversations in which I greatly benefitted from his formidable knowledge of Kierkegaard and his generous support for the present enterprise. As a close friend of Plantinga and an expert on his thought, he has made extremely valuable contributions to certain areas of this dissertation.

It is particularly important to me to thank the GRADE Center for Religious Studies and Theology (RuTh) for the generous financial support in publishing this work.

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Contents

Table of Abbreviations

Kierkegaard

Danish:

Pap. *Søren Kierkegaards Papirer*, vols. I to XI-3 (1909-1948) (ed. by Peter Andreas Heiberg, Victor Kuhr and Einer Torsting). Copenhagen: Gyldendalske Boghandel, Nordisk Forlag. second, expanded ed., vols. I to XI-3 (1968-1978) (ed. by Niels Thulstrap), vols. XIV to XVI index by Niels Jørgen Cappelørn. Copenhagen: Gyldendal.

SKS *Søren Kierkegaards Skrifter*, vols. 1-28, K1-K28 (1997-2012) (ed. by Niels Jørgen Cappelørn, Joakim Garff, Jette Knudsen, Johnny Kondrup, Alastair McKinnon and Finn Hauberg Mortensen). Copenhagen: Gads Forlag.

English:

JP Søren Kierkegaard (1967-1978). *Søren Kierkegaard's Journals and Papers* vol. 1-6 (ed. and transl. by Howard and Edna Hong assisted by Gregor Malantschuk) vol. 1-6, vol. 7 Index and Composite Collation. Bloomington and London: Indiana University Press.

CA Søren Kierkegaard (1980). *The Concept of Anxiety: A Simple Psychologically Orienting Deliberation on the Dogmatic Issue of Hereditary Sin* (ed. and transl. by Reidar Thomte). Princeton: Princeton University Press.

CD Søren Kierkegaard (1995). *Christian Discourses and the Crisis and a Crisis in the Life of an Actress* (ed. and transl. by Howard and Edna Hong). Princeton: Princeton University Press.

CUP1 Søren Kierkegaard (1992). *Concluding Unscientific Postscript to 'Philosophical Fragments'* (ed. and transl. by Howard and Edna Hong). Princeton: Princeton University Press.

CUP2 Søren Kierkegaard (1992). *Concluding Unscientific Postscript to 'Philosophical Fragments'*, (ed. and transl. by Howard and Edna Hong). Princeton: Princeton University Press.

EO1 Søren Kierkegaard (1987). *Either/Or* 1 (ed. and transl. by Howard and Edna Hong). Princeton: Princeton University Press.

EO2 Søren Kierkegaard (1987). *Either/Or* 2 (ed. and transl. by Howard and Edna Hong). Princeton: Princeton University Press.

EUD Søren Kierkegaard (1990). *Eighteen Upbuilding Discourses* (ed. and transl. by Howard and Edna Hong). Princeton: Princeton University Press.

FT Søren Kierkegaard (1983). *Fear and Trembling* (ed. and transl. by Howard and Edna Hong). Princeton: Princeton University Press.

FSE Søren Kierkegaard (1990). *For Self-Examination and Judge for Yourself* (ed. and transl. by Howard and Edna Hong). Princeton: Princeton University Press.

KJN *Kierkegaard' s Journals and Notebooks*, vols. 1-11 (2007ff) (ed. by Niels-Jørgen Cappelørn, Alastair Hannay, David Kangas, Bruce H. Kirmmse, George Pattison, Vanessa Rumble and K. Brian Söderquist). Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press.

PF Søren Kierkegaard (1985). *Philosophical Fragments* (ed. and transl. by Howard and Edna Hong). Princeton: Princeton University Press.

PV Søren Kierkegaard (1998). *The Point of View* (ed. and transl. by Howard and Edna Hong). Princeton: Princeton University Press.

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SLW Søren Kierkegaard (1988). *Stages on Life's Way: Studies by Various Persons* (ed. and transl. by Howard Hong and Edna Hong). Princeton: Princeton University Press.

SUD Søren Kierkegaard (1980). *The Sickness unto Death: A Christian Psychological Exposition for Upbuilding and Awakening* (ed. and transl. by Howard and Edna Hong). Princeton: Princeton University Press.

WL Søren Kierkegaard (1995). *Works of Love* (ed. and transl. by Howard and Edna Hong). Princeton: Princeton University Press 1995.

Plantinga

Books:

GFE Alvin Plantinga (1974). *God, Freedom and Evil*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans.

GOM Alvin Plantinga (1975). *God and Other Minds*. New York: Cornell University Press.

NN Alvin Plantinga (1979). *The Nature of Necessity*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.

WCB Alvin Plantinga (2000). *Warranted Christian Belief*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

WCD Alvin Plantinga (1993). *Warrant: The Current Debate*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

WCRL Alvin Plantinga (2011). *Where the Conflict Really Lies: Science, Religion and Naturalism*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

WPF Alvin Plantinga (1993). *Warrant and Proper Function*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Articles:

DRE Alvin Plantinga (1998). "A Defense of Religious Exclusivism." In James Sennett (ed.), *The Analytic Theist. An Alvin Plantinga Reader.* Grand Rapids: Eerdmans.

FTR Alvin Plantinga (1986). "The Foundations of Theism: A Reply." *Faith and Philosophy, Vol. 3, No. 3.*

HBA Alvin Plantinga (1982). "How to Be an Anti-Realist." *Proceedings and Addresses of the American Philosophical Association, Vol. 56, No. 1.*

PADA Alvin Plantinga (2007). "Preface to the Appendix 'Two Dozen or so Theistic Arguments'." In Deane-Peter Baker (ed.), *Alvin Plantinga*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

PAE Alvin Plantinga (1979). "The Probabilistic Argument from Evil." *Philosophical Studies, Vol. 35, No. 1*.

PNT Alvin Plantinga (1991). "The Prospects for Natural Theology." In James Tomberlin (ed.), *Philosophy of Religion*. Atascadero, CA: Ridgeview Press.

RBG Alvin Plantinga (1983). "Reason and Belief in God." In Alvin Plantinga and Nicholas Wolterstorff (eds.), *Faith and Rationality.* Notre Dame, IN: The University of Notre Dame Press.

RBPB Alvin Plantinga (2000). "Religious Belief as Properly Basic." In Brian Davies (ed.), *Philosophy of Religion. A Guide and Anthology*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

RC Alvin Plantinga (2015). "Replies to my Commentators." In Dieter Schönecker (ed.), *Plantinga's "Warranted Christian Belief." Critical Essays with a Reply by Alvin Plantinga*. Berlin/Boston: De Gruyter.

RPE	Alvin Plantinga (2001). "Rationality and Public Evidence: A Reply to Richard Swinburne." *Religious Studies, Vol. 37, No. 2.*
RSP	Alvin Plantinga (1996). "Respondeo." In Jonathan Kvanvig (ed.), *Warrant in Contemporary Epistemology: Essays in Honor of Plantinga's Theory of Knowledge.* Savage: Rowman and Littlefield.
RZ	Alvin Plantinga (2002). "Reply. Ad Zagzebski." *Philosophical Books, Vol. 43, No. 2.*
SP	Alvin Plantinga (1985). "Self-Profile." In James Tomberlin and Peter van Inwagen (eds.), *Alvin Plantinga*. Dordrecht: Reidel Publishing Company.
TDSE	Alvin Plantinga (2009). "Transworld Depravity, Transworld Sanctity, & Uncooperative Essences." *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research, Vol. LXXVIII, No.1.*
TDTA	Alvin Plantinga (2007). "Two Dozen (or so) Theistic Arguments." In Deane-Peter Baker (ed.), *Alvin Plantinga*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
WATB	Alvin Plantinga (1997). "Warrant and Accidentally True Belief." *Analysis, Vol. 57, No. 2.*

Interviews:

CMRT	Alvin Plantinga (2016). Can Many Religions all be True? https://www.closertotruth.com/series/can-many-religions-all-be-true
GP	Alvin Plantinga & Hilary Putnam (2000). The God Problem. http://archives.wbur.org/theconnection/2000/07/12/philosophy-series-part-five-the-god-problem.html
PDRE	Alvin Plantinga (1996). Pluralism: Defense of Religious Exclusivism. https://web.archive.org/web/20171016032840/http://www.veritas.org/pluralism-defense-religious-exclusivism/

Introduction

The present work might be interesting to any person who is interested in the question whether theistic belief (more specifically the Christian belief) is rational – and ultimately whether, given our contemporary diverse culture, such faith is acceptable. In other words the query is whether any reasonable meaning can nowadays be rendered from Bible verses such as "Faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see," (Hebrews 11:1) or "Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by man, but by my Father in heaven," (Matthew 16:17)[1] – which seem to suggest (at least according to some interpretations) that faith is *opposed* (or – to couch it in a more optimistic scenario – *indifferent*) to rational argumentation; hence the title of our work: "Justified Faith without Reasons?"

In what follows we intend to show that the answer to the aforementioned question can be exemplified and resolved by importing ideas from Søren Kierkegaard's and Alvin Plantinga's affirmative take on the matter, and for this purpose we sketch a comparison of their epistemologies.

At first sight such an enterprise might seem surprising, as many would point out that from plotting the issue between a continental way of philosophizing, like that of Kierkegaard (with its existentialist bent), and an Anglo-Saxon analytical one, like that of Plantinga (with its rationalist proclivities), there emerges – at least prima facie – an absolute incompatibility.

Indeed, it is an undeniable fact that there are great differences (The present project exhibits these.) between the ways in which the two authors think and argue regarding the focus of their respective projects; this should not come as a surprise, given the different times and circumstances of their lives.

For example, Kierkegaard says in one place that "Christianity is no doctrine; it is an existence, an existing,"[2] and somewhere else (through the voice of Johannes Climacus) that, "Christianity is not a doctrine, but it expresses an existence contradiction, and is an existence communication,"[3] and this despite the fact that, as David Gouwens observed, Christianity includes for the Danish philosopher beliefs and doctrines.[4] This stance should not be surprising, given the cultural context in

1 NIV Bible translation.

2 *SKS* 23, 322, NB18:98 / *KJN* 7, 328 (here and hereafter no text referred to by using an abbreviation will use 'p.' or 'pp.'; all other texts will).

3 *SKS* 7, 345-346 / *CUP*1, 379-380; *SKS* 23, 186, NB17:33 / *KJN* 7, 188.

4 David Gouwens, *Kierkegaard as Religious Thinker*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1996, pp. 34, 53.

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which he lived, a society in which almost everybody considered himself a Christian (Even the Danish Hegelians saw themselves as representatives of a philosophical kind of Christianity.); but Kierkegaard was painfully aware that this assessment did not correspond to reality, because for him being Christian did not consist primarily of possessing correct doctrines, but rather of *living* in a certain way – according to a God-given pattern.

On the other hand, Plantinga's objective has a different focus: although there are places where he writes a prescription of what a legitimate Christian lifestyle should entail, this aspect does not play a prominent role in his writings. And this may probably be attributed to the challenge of facing another cultural milieu, one in which many thinkers claim that religious language is meaningless and that religious beliefs are irrational; of course, in such an intellectual context to be a Christian is out of fashion. Therefore he argues (against the empirical positivist *Verifiability Criterion of Meaning*) that talk of God and religious doctrines is not meaningless[5] and (against *Classical Foundationalism*) that theistic belief is neither irrational nor unjustified.[6] Moreover, he asserts that both theistic and (in particular) Christian beliefs are *warranted*[7] (constituting true knowledge), and in support of this view he excogitates an *externalist epistemology*; in this respect he uses the insights of Edmund Gettier (his former colleague from Wayne State University)[8], whose famous three-page article "Is Justified True Belief Knowledge?"[9] furnished him with a strong support for this new kind of epistemology.[10]

However, Genia Schönbaumsfeld places the two authors in stark contrast, with Plantinga accusing (in her opinion) Kierkegaard of "extreme fideism" and "irrationalism" in matters of religious thought, the American Reformed epistemologist being in this context (by contrast) a strong defender of the rationality of religion (or, in a more negative assessment, a religious rationalist).[11] And indeed, Schönbaumsfeld offers a quote from Plantinga which seems to validate her view, one that can be found in a chapter from Brian Davies' *Philosophy of Religion* anthology:

> According to the most common brand of extreme fideism, however, reason and faith conflict or clash on matters of religious importance; and when they do, faith is to be preferred

5 *SP*, 18.
6 *SP*, 57-60.
7 *WCB*, 174, 199, 285.
8 *SP*, 22-23, 28-29.
9 Edmund Gettier, "Is Justified True Belief Knowledge?", *Analysis* 23. 6, June 1963, pp. 121-123.
10 *SP*, 28-29; *WPF*, 31-32, 36-37.
11 Genia Schönbaumsfeld, *A Confusion of Spheres: Kierkegaard and Wittgenstein on Philosophy and Religion*, Oxford: Oxford University Press 2007, pp. 3, 86, 138.

> and reason suppressed. Thus, according to Kierkegaard, faith teaches "the absurdity that the eternal is the historical". He means to say, I think, that this proposition is among the deliverances of faith but absurd from the point of view of reason; and it should be accepted despite this absurdity.[12]

But even if this is true, one should bear here in mind that, despite the apparent "fresh" publishing of Davies' aforementioned *Anthology* (in the year 2000), Plantinga's contribution to this book – namely chapter 4 ("Religious Belief as Properly Basic") – is only a re-publishing of an older article, his much-discussed "Reason and Belief in God"[13] (which in fact appeared in 1983, in the median period of his authorship[14]). Yet since then, his opinion about Kierkegaard seems to have significantly changed: Thus, in a pericope from *Warranted Christian Belief* (published in 2000) Plantinga clearly states that his own epistemological stance, which supports the possibility of *reaching truth without appealing to any "sure and certain method"*, was clearly influenced by Kierkegaard.[15]

Regardless, in what follows we try to show that, although there are places in which Kierkegaard argues for the absurdity of faith – while Plantinga is clearly a supporter of faith's rationality, in the end their views seem to draw closer to each other as first sight suggests (especially if one bears in mind that Kierkegaard seems to evaluate this situation through the eyes of a classical foundationalist, while Plantinga clearly rejects such a stance).

There are many other places in which their views seem to converge, and eventually to complement each other. And this probably should be of no surprise, since they in fact share a common Christian theology – and adhere (more specifically) to a magisterial type of Protestantism. As expected, for instance, both of them agree that, "Faith is not based on arguments, but rather through a direct revelation of the word, mediated by the Holy Spirit," as both Luther and Calvin, the respective "fathers" of the Lutheran and Reformed branches of Protestantism (to which Kierkegaard and Plantinga respectively belonged) shared this view.[16] Moreover, their more or less conservative perspectives on Christian theology might also be explained by

12 *RBPB*, 91.

13 *RBG*, 87.

14 During this time Plantinga's views on Kierkegaard's thinking might have been influenced by Abraham Kuyper, a Dutch theologian and politician who was (posthumously) a kind of theological mentor for Plantinga, but otherwise was not himself a Kierkegaard expert. At least this seems to be Stephen Evans' view on the matter (I had a personal discussion with Evans on this subject).

15 *WCB*, 436-437.

16 See in this respect *SP*, 60 and chapter 10 from the present work.

the fact that both of them inherit some conservative Protestant roots, Plantinga's family being adherent of the "Gereformeerde Kerken", a movement of religious renewal "dedicated to the practice of historic Calvinism"[17] within the Dutch Reformed state church, while Kierkegaard's family had close ties with a renewal movement within the Danish Lutheran church – the theologian and bishop Jacob Peter Mynster (who was a confessor of King Frederick VI and a close friend of Michael Pedersen Kierkegaard, Søren's father) was one of the group's prominent members.

Interestingly, in one of the (admittedly few) places where Plantinga refers (in his writings) to Kierkegaard we can notice that the similarity between Plantinga's views and those of Kierkegaard (at least in the way the Danish philosopher is interpreted by Stephen Evans) is striking[18]; consequently, the question that might be raised is: In what measure was the American philosopher's thinking influenced by that of the Dane? And if there was indeed such an influence, was it a direct or rather an "accidental" one?

Based on the few places where Plantinga refers to Kierkegaard in his authorship (twice in "Reason and Belief in God"[19], once in *Warrant: The Current Debate*[20] and once in *Warranted Christian Belief*[21]), it would seem the answer is the latter; contrast this with the frequency with which he cites theologians or philosophers like John Calvin, Thomas Reid, Jonathan Edwards and Abraham Kuyper in (most of) his major works (almost all of whom have a Reformed inclination), and the impression increases that Kierkegaard's influence on his thinking was not very great (and that if there was an influence, it was a rather indirect one).

This inference is supported in personal correspondence pertaining to the present work by Evans, a good friend of Plantinga, both having studied and obtained their PhD's from Yale University, and having also held teaching positions at Calvin College, in Grand Rapids, MI. Evans, who is one of the leading contemporary American experts on Kierkegaard, wrote to us that, in his opinion, Plantinga "has never really studied Kierkegaard himself", although "he has a great respect for

17 *SP*, 4; among others, the theologian Abraham Kuyper, premier of the Netherlands between 1901 and 1905 and founder of the Calvinist "Free University" in Amsterdam, was a prominent leader of this movement.

18 Compare in this respect WCB, 436-437 with Stephen Evans, "Realism and antirealism in Kierkegaard's 'Concluding Unscientific Postscript'", in Alastair Hannay and Gordon Marino (eds.), *The Cambridge Companion to Kierkegaard*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1998, pp. 169-170; we will discuss this similarity between Kierkegaard's and Plantinga's epistemological views at the end of chapter 3.

19 *RBG*, 87, 88.

20 *WCD*, 98.

21 *WCB*, 436.

Kierkegaard;" and this respect for the Dane comes (in Evans' opinion) from Oets Kolk Bouwsma (1898-1978), an American analytic philosopher educated (like him) at Calvin College, of Dutch-Frisian origins (like Plantinga's family) who was an expert on G. E. Moore, Ludwig Wittgenstein and Kierkegaard's philosophy, and whom Plantinga greatly admired. Moreover, Evans admitted that Plantinga's respect for Kierkegaard comes also from his appreciation for his (Evans') own writings about the Danish philosopher.

Indeed, we tend to believe that the aforementioned passage from *Warranted Christian Belief*, where Plantinga suggests that his view "about the relation between truth and the (lack of) method of reaching it" agrees with that of Kierkegaard, was directly influenced by Evans' interpretation of the Dane's epistemology. Even if this is so, however, the influence is not one-sided, but rather reciprocal, as Evans himself consistently uses Plantinga's epistemology in order to illuminate (various aspects of) Kierkegaard's perspective on religious belief, as is visible especially in two of his articles: "Kierkegaard and Plantinga on Belief in God: Subjectivity as the Ground of Properly Basic Religious Beliefs"[22] and "Externalist Epistemology, Subjectivity, and Christian Knowledge: Plantinga and Kierkegaard".[23] Both of these also play an important role in our present work.

But even if some of Plantinga's ideas might indeed be traced, albeit through mediation, to Kierkegaard, it still seems true that most of the similarities of the American philosopher's ideas to those of the Dane's are rather incidental, having to do (as we have argued above) with their common Christian and Protestant tradition and eventually (as we shall argue in chapters 1 and 3) with the more or less direct contact they both had with the *Common Sense* tradition. In this respect we are persuaded along with Evans that it is most probable that Plantinga has not delved too deep into Kierkegaard's philosophy and that his parallels with Kierkegaard (as Evans puts it in a message sent to us) "partly reflect rootage in the early Christian tradition, partly similarities in those with Protestant upbringings."

In the present work we opt for an interpretation of Kierkegaard's ideas preponderantly in line with that of a class of Kierkegaard scholars such as Evans, Marilyn Piety and Merold Westphal (although many other scholars have also contributed more or less significantly to our conclusions). We do not pretend that this interpretation represents the only possible reading of his views, but this admission does

22 Stephen Evans, "Kierkegaard and Plantinga on Belief in God: Subjectivity as the Ground of Properly Basic Religious Beliefs", in Stephen Evans, *Kierkegaard on Faith and the Self: Collected Essays*, Waco TX, Baylor University Press 2006, pp. 169-182.

23 Stephen Evans, "Externalist Epistemology, Subjectivity, and Christian Knowledge: Plantinga and Kierkegaard", in Evans, *Kierkegaard on Faith and the Self: Collected Essays*, pp. 183-205.

not imply that it is a purely subjective or arbitrary elucidation; on the contrary, we believe that as an exegesis it fulfills the criteria of high academic rigor.

The intention of our work is not primarily a critical evaluation of Kierkegaard's or of Plantinga's epistemology, although in some chapters we deal with various objections against their views (being nevertheless aware that reason is in some respects perspectival, having, even in its critical stance, no pretense to infallibility, no access to the God's eye view, as both Kierkegaard and Plantinga would agree). Yet even if our goal is not essentially critical, neither is it chiefly descriptive. Rather the focus of our work is the measure in which the two perspectives either converge or complement each other, being able – in the end –to produce a profound and (for our times) relevant philosophical synthesis.

The present work is divided into 4 main sections.

The first section articulates the theme of "theoretical epistemology" common to both philosophers. The section contains 3 chapters: chapter 1, where we explore the objective epistemology of Kierkegaard, followed by chapter 2, which engages the non-religious epistemology of Plantinga, and finally chapter 3, which invites a comparison between Kierkegaard's and Plantinga's theoretical epistemologies.

In the first chapter we start by offering various reasons for advocating a classical approach to Kierkegaard's pseudonymous writings (according to whom the texts contain, among other things, philosophical doctrines). Then we refer to Kierkegaard's *epistemological* perspective, especially to the epistemological *concepts* he adduces: the Leibnizean/Humean dichotomy between *truths of reason and truths of fact* (and the characteristics of these two types of truths). These concepts enable us to introduce on the one hand those beliefs which, from the perspective of a knowledge in a *strict sense*, are certain (pertaining to *logic*, *mathematics* and *"immediate sensation"*) and those beliefs which, from the same *strict* perspective, are *uncertain* and therefore susceptible to *skepticism* (pertaining to *actuality* – for example, *perceptual* beliefs); on the other hand, opposite the first aforementioned strict sense, we present those beliefs which, from the perspective of a knowledge in a loose sense, make possible an *approximate knowledge* though only through *faith* (*tro*). The origin of this loose form of knowledge (which presupposes faith) might be traced via Jacobi and Hamann to the *Common Sense* philosophy of Thomas Reid.

Chapter 2 encapsulates Plantinga's non-religious epistemology, more precisely, his "warrant" epistemological model, which starts with a *rejection* of the so-called *classical foundationalist* model of justification; instead, the model proposes a *Reidian* type of *foundationalism*, in which the warrant to our perceptual propositions is conferred by the fact that they are *formed in* some *proper circumstances* for knowledge and where the *validity* of the perceptual knowledge is a *starting assumption* of the model. To this foundationalism is added the *evidentialism* of Alston, Feldman

and Conee, the *proper function* condition (*in order* to avoid the malfunction-problem of the cognitive equipment), the *appropriate cognitive context* requirement (for a good functioning of the cognitive apparatus), the *"design plan aimed at producing true beliefs"* stipulation (for the respective cognitive faculties), and the *reliability* condition (which means that a high percentage of the beliefs of the relevant cognitive faculty needs to be true).

Plantinga's model can also be called *externalist* in the sense that he asserts that one may know something without being able to offer evidence for one's knowledge. As for Plantinga the real significance of *Gettier* problems is that they show *justification*, conceived *internalistically*, to be *insufficient for warrant*, and that – by contrast – the *externalist* accounts of *warrant* enjoy a certain *immunity from* these problems, a particular place is given in this chapter to defending his evaluation of the Gettier problem against various critiques.

Chapter 3 points out some important similarities between both authors' epistemological views: they use a similar Leibnizean/Humean dichotomy between *truths of reason* and *truths of fact*, understand in the same way the concept of immediate sensation, share similar views regarding perceptual beliefs (From the perspective of a *strong* concept of knowledge, perceptual belief invites skepticism, but such skepticism can be defeated, from the perspective of a weaker sense of knowledge, only through belief.) and seem to have been more or less directly influenced – in what concerns this *weaker* sense of knowledge – by Thomas Reid's *Common-Sense* philosophy. Moreover both authors agree that, although there is no method of producing sure and objective knowledge, the classical ideal of this knowledge remains valid: there is a reality independent of us that we are attempting to know. The chapter also includes a critical discussion regarding, on the one hand, the concept of the "taking for granted" of our cognitive nature (present in Reid's, Moore's and Wittgenstein's philosophy) and, on the other hand, the Kantian objection against the Common Sense ideas.

Furthermore, *the second section* sheds light on the theme of the knowledge that God exists as exemplified by both philosophers. The second section also contains 3 chapters: chapter 4, which refers to the knowledge of God's existence in Kierkegaard, chapter 5, which refers to the knowledge of God's existence in Plantinga, and chapter 6, which is a comparison of their views regarding the knowledge that God exists.

Chapter 4 describes the way in which the belief in God's existence, from Kierkegaard's perspective is somehow inherently built into our human consciousness, being a part of the so-called immanent metaphysical knowledge, which is subject to "Socratic recollection." Any attempt to prove that God exists should be rejected as coming from a person who ignores God's presence. This radical claim notwithstanding, it be shown that Kierkegaard still might accept, more or less implicitly, two arguments for the existence of God: a pragmatic and a moral one, and that,

in any case, both despair and the awareness of the ethical imperative might act as triggering factors for the belief in God's existence.

Moreover, according to Kierkegaard, belief in God is mediated through *inwardness* (which might be manifested through an individual's willingness "to renounce the relative for the sake of the absolute" – thus having chiefly to do with the way in which a person relates herself to the ethical realm).

Chapter 5 presents Plantinga's arguments for the proposition that belief in God does not need evidence in order to be rational; in this sense he rejects both the *classical foundationalist* criterion for proper basicality and a *modified form of this criterion* (which includes beliefs that are considered properly basic by almost everyone) due to their self-referential inconsistency. Instead, he proposes a private criterion of proper basicality; such a criterion must be reached (in his opinion) inductively.

The chapter also offers some objections to this criterion (for example, "that any religious aberration can be taken as properly basic," or "that there are some apparently good reasons for denying that God exists") and shows Plantinga's rebuttal against them. We critically address his rebuttal.

Furthermore we examine a second sense, appearing in Plantinga's later work, in which a belief can be properly basic, one that includes the notion of *warrant*. In this respect belief in God is produced by a cognitive faculty called *"sensus divinitatis,"* an input-output device which takes triggering circumstances (like seeing the splendour of a night sky, the beauty of a flower, etc.) as input, and issues theistic beliefs as output. This model involves *an externalist* epistemological view according to which a person who knows something does not need also to know that she knows something: for example, that she possesses the faculty of sensus divinitatis; the validity of the model depends on the existence of its "object": if God exists, then this idea – the existence of a *sensus divinitatis* in us – becomes plausible.

An objection to this model emerges from the evident fact that not all humans have theistic beliefs, and not all theists believe in God with the same degree of certainty. Plantinga suggests that the doctrine of original sin provides a possible way to address this empirical defeater.

Chapter 6 points out an important similarity between Kierkegaard's belief in God's existence, which seems to belong, he thinks, to a kind of certain and universal human knowledge that can be discovered through recollection, and Plantinga's idea that the belief in God's existence represents a properly basic warranted truth (which suggests, again, a type of universal knowledge produced by a cognitive mechanism which shows how recollection works).

However, there are also differences between their stance on the problem of the rationality of religion: Kierkegaard offers no justification for accepting belief in God without any argument (and could therefore be accused of fideism), while Plantinga at least shows that the criteria devised to refute the proper basicality of the belief in

God are not valid. Moreover, Kierkegaard rejects any arguments for the existence of God, because they seem for him to be a form of disrespect for a God who is visible for everybody, while Plantinga considers such arguments (potentially) useful in order to increase the warrant of theistic belief against various defeaters.

Additionally on the one hand, Plantinga's externalist model might contribute to a better understanding of the way in which despair and the ethical imperative might "trigger" belief in God. On the other hand, although for both philosophers sin might obliterate the *sensus divinitatis*, Kierkegaard's opinion that belief in God is *conditioned* by *inwardness* might better explain why such an explanation is not a cheap *ad hominem* against atheists.

In *the third section* there is an additional discussion regarding the arguments for the existence of God by both philosophers. In Chapter 7 we (critically) sketch Kierkegaard's rejection of the arguments for the existence of God, while chapter 8 presents Plantinga's oscillating attitude toward these arguments. Chapter 9 contains a comparison between both views on the arguments.

Chapter 7 offers an evaluation of Climacus' objections to the arguments for the existence of God (Climacus very probably, although not absolutely certainly, reveals Kierkegaard's stance on this matter). With one exception (the critique of the ontological argument, which seems to anticipate the contemporary logico-empiricist position on the matter), these objections are found wanting. In the first general objection, Climacus seems illegitimately to leap from the objective reality of God's existence (or non-existence) to the subjective conviction about God's existence (or non-existence). In the second, one might find exceptions to Climacus' assertion that one can never deduce the existence of persons from the facts of the palpable world. Further, the objection against the teleological argument is inconclusive, since, in our opinion, Climacus does not offer a clear structure to—or critique of—this argument. Lastly, the ethico-religious objection fails because, even if one would accept the reality of a *sensus divinitatis*, God's existence is not yet transparently evident to us.

Nonetheless, in Climacus' treatment of all these objections we observe similarities to certain ideas of contemporary reformed epistemology: a skepticism with regard to natural theology, a belief in a *sensus divinitatis* and a positive assessment of the role of *faith* as an epistemological presupposition.

The task to be dealt with in Chapter 8 is to examine Plantinga's view on the arguments for the existence of God. During his life Plantinga has occasionally changed his assessment of this problem. In the earliest works his view exhibits a very strict (quasi–Classical-Foundationalist) conception of the project of natural theology: therefore, it comes as no surprise that during that period of his life the respective project – in his opinion – failed. Reflecting back on that past segment of his life, he will later argue that his stance (on this subject) was too pessimistic, an assessment with which we fully agree.

In his "middle" works (in which he had a less strict opinion on the meaning of natural theology, its function now being to show that religious belief is rationally acceptable) one can sense a more optimistic outlook, and contrary to his earlier dismissal, the project becomes more promising. In addressing this middle period we focus on the ontological argument.

In his later works he displays an even lesser stringency regarding natural theology. Now the aim of natural theology is that of transforming belief into knowledge, by suggesting that belief in God is warranted. According to this last perspective, the arguments might be accepted as needed in order eventually to provide more warrant for the belief in God's existence only if the person who uses them starts from the presupposition of God's existence; they would have the role of strengthening the faith of someone whose belief might be wavering. In his article "Two Dozen (or so) Theistic Arguments" Plantinga considers that, when judged by reasonable philosophical standards, such arguments (as those from the nature of sets, or numbers, or properties, from Physical Constants, the Naive Teleological argument, the argument from the Confluence of Proper Function and Reliability, the Moral argument, the argument from Evil, etc.) are good, although not "coercive in the sense that every person is obliged to accept their premises on pain of irrationality."[24] Not all of the aforementioned arguments are developed in the aforementioned article: in fact, some of them are *only mentioned* by him in it – nothing more. In the following we shall try to develop, and eventually defend, many of these arguments.

Chapter 9 brings to light the similarities and differences between the views of both philosophers regarding the arguments for the existence of God. Thus, in the early period of his authorship Plantinga shares with Kierkegaard (especially with the pseudonym Climacus) a similar skepticism towards their *validity* (but also, conversely, a skepticism regarding the so-called arguments *against* the existence of God), a perspective akin to Kant's view on the same topic.

Remarkably, in his later works Plantinga changes his view on the subject, arguing now that, after all, some arguments might be good (or plausible) in a broad philosophic sense, although rejecting them does not amount to simple irrationality. In this respect the presuppositions of those who accept them are essential in their decision regarding the subject. One might suggest that this view is totally opposed to what Kierkegaard had to say in this respect, but we shall argue that similar ideas could be found even in his authorship. For example, some of Climacus' passages seem to suggest that certain arguments for God's existence might become plausible if one takes God's existence as the central *presupposition* behind their premises.

24 *TDTA*, 210.

The fourth (*and last*) *section* explores the knowledge of the truth of Christianity as exemplified by both philosophers. The section contains 4 chapters: chapter 10, where we explore Kierkegaard's perspective on the knowledge of the truth of Christianity, followed by chapter 11, where we set the stage for Plantinga's view on the knowledge of the truth of Christianity, then chapter 12, which discusses Kierkegaard's perspective on the rationality of the transition among the competing interpretations of existence, and finally chapter 13, which compares Kierkegaard's and Plantinga's views on the knowledge of the truth of Christianity.

Chapter 10 highlights the way in which Kierkegaard's take on Christian faith might be understood as being an externalist kind of knowledge inasmuch as it is viewed as a *condition* received by the believer from God; the truth which is its focus is of a *subjective* nature. We also discuss the sense in which for the pseudonym Climacus *subjectivity* can in some cases be *truth* whilst in others *untruth*, not to mention the relationship between the *how* and the *what* of faith in each of these situations.

Moreover, we present the way in which Climacus almost "recreates" the content of revelation, by "deducing" it from two premises: that of the non-possession of the truth (by the learner) and that of the purported motivation of God for saving humanity (which was love).

We also discuss Kierkegaard's definition of faith, his perspective on the relationship between faith and history and the egalitarian implications of this view. In addition to this, we argue that Kierkegaard's leaps toward faith are not merely blind leaps, but rather springs in which someone – in Westphal's words – "knows what she is jumping towards."

Chapter 11 offers an evaluation of Plantinga's perspective regarding the knowledge of the truth of Christianity: his intention is to oppose the *de jure* objection to Christianity – which suggests that one does not even need to know if the Christian religion is true in order to dismiss it; such a dismissal merely requires to prove that Christianity is irrational.

By contrast, Plantinga argues that if Christianity is true, then very probably it is also rational and warranted. Moreover, he argues that for a believer *faith* has warrant, because God bequeathed such passion to her; thus, in principle, faith is a special kind of knowledge whose content is known through a *cognitive process* in which the Holy Spirit induces in a person the belief in the statements of gospel. The beliefs constituting faith are thus taken as basic and are legitimate from both an *internalist* and an *externalist* perspective: from an *internalist* perspective they are justified and internally rational, while from an *externalist* perspective they are externally rational and warranted. Plantinga also argues that these beliefs are warranted even if one cannot make a good historical case for the truth of the statements of the gospel – by his light, what's important here is only the fact that the faith is *well grounded* (in an externalist sense).

The chapter then deals critically with various objections against this Plantingian model: that it is irrational because here faith seems nothing more than "a blind leap over a crevasse in the night," that many bizarre religions might be considered rational on this basis, that it does not prove that faith has warrant, that the atheists are – contrary to Plantinga's preoccupations – primarily interested in whether Christian theism is (given the available evidence) true and that faith requires historical arguments in order to count as real knowledge. We offer Plantinga's rebuttals to each of these arguments.

In chapter 12 we argue for the rationality of the transition between the competing interpretations of existence in Kierkegaard's view. Against the classical view on this transition, according to which Kierkegaard had a religious goal from the beginning, we firstly present a challenge offered by Alasdair MacIntyre, according to whom we should understand Kierkegaard's intention (from *Either-Or*) as that of presenting the reader with an ultimate choice between an aesthetical and an ethical stage of existence. In this respect the Danish thinker did not commend one option over the other.

We then show Marilyn Piety's and Gordon Marino's replies to this assertion. For Piety the aforementioned "ultimate choice" interpretation is possible only when a person has a *dispassionate* stance toward her existence, but she offers evidence that for the Dane in reality *passion* permeates one's reason in such cases. For Marino, Kierkegaard's rationality of transition is understood in similar terms to those of the *"theory choice"* model of scientific rationality. MacIntyre's response (to these rebuttals) is that, although some passions are for the Dane essential in transition, the ones suggested by both authors are not continuous between the stages.

Against this we import Evans' reply, which states that there are some ethical leanings which are present even in the aesthetic stage and that the ethicist's problem is not firstly one of ignorance, but rather one of the unwillingness to commit himself to what he already knows. Moreover, he argues that Kierkegaard can be considered an *externalist* epistemologist, for whom knowledge is a matter of being *rightly related to the external world;* for the Dane our ability for so relating partly depends on the qualities we possess as human beings. We argue that such a view is similar to that proposed by Michael Polanyi in his philosophy of science.

In the last chapter (chapter 13) we compare Kierkegaard's and Plantinga's perspectives on the knowledge of the truth of Christianity. Both authors share a similar view of the Christian faith, which is seen as a gift from God and has as its ground a transforming *encounter* with Christ. The content of faith is also similar: for Plantinga it is the *gospel*, for Kierkegaard God's *incarnation* to save humanity. Here a disagreement will seemingly emerge in their views on the relationship between faith and reason: for Kierkegaard sometimes faith seems unreasonable, while for Plantinga there is nothing contrary to reason in it. However, this disagreement

might be only a purely semantic dispute between them related to their different epistemological backgrounds. One can also see here an important way in which Plantinga's externalist epistemology might contribute to a better understanding of Kierkegaard's view on faith, eliminating the stain of irrationality from it.

Moreover, both authors see the historical arguments as non-essential for the knowledge of the truth of Christianity, a perspective which has egalitarian soteriological implications. Also, they both agree that Christianity implies a so-called risky *leap* toward faith, although for both of them this leap is not irrational, but guided by a pragmatic rationality.

In addition, the two authors share the idea that there is an objective truth, although there is no method which would guarantee access to it. A specific contribution on Kierkegaard's part to the understanding of the rationality of transition toward a Christian stage of existence is to show in detail the way in which such a transition is mediated through *inwardness*.